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ABSTRACT

The characteristics and functions of sound undergraduate and masters level programs in geography are examined. The author believes that because the reputation and fate of a geography department are determined by non-geographers to a very large degree, there is an urgent need to promote the relevance of the discipline and to sell the indispensability of geography at a given institution. There are two major sections, the first dealing with the undergraduate program and the second focusing on the masters program. To be most successful, undergraduate programs should be carefully designed and developed to best exploit (1) the most recent developments of the discipline, (2) the nature and location of the institution, (3) the college or unit under which geography functions, and (4) the size of the geography unit and the training and interests of the faculty members. To underscore the many roles and functions of undergraduate programs in geography today, a description of the various types of undergraduate programs such as preparation for graduate training, a terminal degree program, and a general education major is provided. The master's program in geography serves two functions. One type of program is designed to prepare the student for advanced or Ph.D. work in geography or a related field. The other type of program serves as a terminal degree program preparing students for teaching careers at the secondary or 2-year college level or careers in nonacademic situations. The paper concludes with the recommendation that geography departments be monitored and accredited by a recognized national organization. (RM)

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GEOGRAPHY UNDERGRADUATE AND MASTER'S PROGRAMS IN THE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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The diversity of contemporary geography has been discussed at length in the papers previously presented. This inherent characteristic of the discipline has been a source of strength, and a distinct disadvantage, particularly as it applies to the development of college instructional programs. The many diverse and viable subfields of American geography makes it difficult to design and put to wide use a standard program of instruction at the undergraduate and Master's levels suitable for all institutions. In many other disciplines, standardized introductory, secondary and advanced level courses and overall programs have been designed that are widely recognized, accepted, and utilized by the respective professions. The lack of rigid uniformity in geography programs has often been criticized by academicians in other fields.

The diversity of geography, however, and the subsequent flexibility of its instructional programs has been advantageous in one major respect. Programs may be designed and developed to fit the needs and objectives of a specific college or university, thereby providing a greater service to that institution than would an inflexible program or a highly standardized set of courses.

The Undergraduate Program

There is not now, nor has there been in the past, nor is it likely there will be in the immediate future, a standardized and universal bachelor's program in geography. However, there are definable and recognizable unifying

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threads within the fabric of individual programs that also serve as common bonds between programs at various institutions. These unifying threads or basic concepts include such themes as spatial organization and interaction, man-land relationships, regional and areal development and change, evolution of the landscape, resource distribution and utilization, and others. It is apparent, however, that we have not defined nor publicized these concepts sufficiently well for the geographic profession as a whole and certainly not to the satisfaction of the non-geographers. There is a need to identify and define the four, five, or whatever number of key concepts and the raison d'etre of the discipline to dispell the cloudiness among those in other disciplines and to serve as general and broad guidelines for geographers themselves. Articulation of the basic concepts or unifying threads in straight-forward and understandable terms might do more to promote the discipline among non-geographers than any one single effort.

To be most successful, undergraduate programs should be carefully designed and developed to best exploit, (1) the contemporary thrusts and recent developments of the discipline, (2) the nature and location of the institution, (3) the college or unit under which geography functions, and (4) the size of the geography unit and the training and interests of the faculty members.

A sound undergraduate program must reflect the current status of the discipline. The program needs to include courses dealing with new methodologies, techniques, and subject matter; and the faculty must be cognizant of the developments within the areas of their specialties and responsibilities. Above all, regardless of the specific place or role of geography, the undergraduate program must reflect current material, both in terms of course subject matter content and methods of presentation.

Each institution is unique. Physical locations, composition of student bodies, organizational structures, goals, missions, objectives, ties to area, region and nation, vary from one institution to another. These differences may be highly significant. The successful undergraduate programs have been designed and developed to be compatible with the institution's goals, and functions, and its physical, economic and social environments. Geography departments and programs most often are found within the colleges of arts and sciences. However, these colleges themselves differ greatly in composition and structure from one university to another. Also, on occasion, geography may be placed in other colleges such as business, or divisions of social studies or natural resources. The administrative unit under which geography is located will determine to a significant degree the types of undergraduate courses and programs that can be developed. The diversity of geography, with its several recognized subfields, can be of great advantage in this respect in that certain subfields, compatible with the aims of the college or division, can be strongly emphasized and developed, while other subfields may be only superficially represented or dropped from the program entirely. The variety and number of subfields in geography are such that no one department can be equally strong in all. The successful department, therefore, selects those areas for empnasis and development that are suitable to the college and university of which it is a part and, at the same time, are not perceived to be the exclusive territory or under the sole jurisdiction of another unit of the institution.[1]

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[1] An excellent commentary concerning the possible future problems of college geography may be found in: Wilbanks, T. J. and Libbe, M. "Avoiding the Demise of Geography in the United States," The Professional Geographer, Vol. 31, No. 1, February 1979 (pages 1-7).

The size and composition of the geography department or unit will have a direct bearing on the undergraduate program. It is obvious that a small department will be restricted in the number and kinds of courses that can be offered. A large department, on the other hand, could from the physical standpoint, offer a large variety of courses, but may elect to focus their efforts in developing areas of concentration in a few subfields rather than on designing a broad coverage type of program.

Many college and university geography faculty members find themselves teaching and doing research in fields which do not precisely reflect their graduate training. However, it is rare in geography for a given person to develop an expertise in a subfield remote from his or her formal graduate training. It would be unlikely for a person trained in social geography to be teaching and doing research in advanced climatology or vice versa. All things being equal, it is best for the undergraduate geography program overall if the individual faculty member is engaged in activities related directly to his or her formal graduate education. It is wise to take advantage of this training, but at the same time, it is also important to be alert as to how this expertise might be expanded or modified to develop new opportunities if and when they arise. Narrow interests and a rigid point of view usually are not in the best interest of the total instructional program.

Roles of the Undergraduate Program

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, a review of the types of undergraduate programs might be in order only to underscore the many roles and functions of undergraduate programs in geography today. Some programs are designed to provide the student with an area of concentration or major in the discipline. The geography major means different things to different groups of

students. Some look at the major as preparation for graduate training in geography or a related field. Others visualize a terminal degree program to prepare themselves for a career in teaching, cartography, planning, or some other non-academic field; while, still others, look to the major as a liberal or general education major and do not aspire to professional careers in geography or related disciplines. Although similar in some respects, each of these major programs will have different emphases. A geography department faced with these varying demands must either devise separate individual programs, or very carefully design one program flexible in nature, with several options. It is also common to design specific areas of concentration within the overall geography major such as cartography, climatology, planning, or resource management.

In some institutions, the geography unit will provide courses for an interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary major in such areas as environmental science, earth science, urban studies, or area studies focusing on a specific region or culture. Such majors require the close cooperation of several departments, each usually providing one to two required courses and several other courses as electives. Geography courses serving in this role often must be modified in content in order to best serve a different population than that enrolled in the conventional geography program.

Traditionally, geography programs have designed selected courses that have served as service courses, often as part of the general or liberal education programs. It is not uncommon to find that these courses make up the bulk of the total student credit hours in the geography program. Many of these courses, today as in the past, focus on areas, regions or cultures. The layman and those in other disciplines perceive that a traditional and

important role of geography is to provide knowledge of places. This function is critical today as the American people and the country as a whole are becoming more involved in world economic, political and social affairs. The media continually stress the importance of geographic literacy in the modern world, for not only the decision and policy makers, but the American public in general. The discipline needs to capitalize on this feeling and develop additional pertinent materials and stronger lines of communication with the layman and other disciplines. The historians, for example, have never lost sight of their basic function of providing knowledge of human events in the context of time. As a result, the lay person understands and appreciates what history is and what the historian does. Perhaps, if geographers had paid more attention to promoting the knowledge of place, we might be in a better position today to assume the leadership role in global education.

The question of how many and which of these roles of the undergraduate program should be developed by a given geography department is crucial. There is a very real danger in attempting to do too much - providing something for everyone - resulting in over extension and spreading available resources too thinly. Further, expansion into many areas often results in jurisdictional disputes. Considerable time and energy are expended in such disputes, and in such confrontations with well established and central disciplines, geography rarely comes out ahead in the long run. Nevertheless, the basic question asked by administrators, and those in positions of influence, is how precisely does this department or unit contribute to the overall welfare of the college or university community. Because of their visibility, the undergraduate programs often are a major factor in determining the department's contribution. Perhaps, among the most important professional decisions to be made by

a geography department are what the role and nature of their undergraduate programs should be and how they are developed.

The Masters' Program in Geography

Essentially, the Master's programs in geography serve two functions. One type of program is designed to prepare the student for advanced or Ph.D. work in geography or a related field. The other type of program serves as a terminal degree program preparing students for teaching careers at the secondary or two-year college level, or more commonly today, careers in non-academic situations. Unlike the undergraduate major, the general or liberal education major is normally not present at the Master's level.

Programs preparatory to Ph.D. training are usually well conceived and almost without exception are built on the expertise and specialties of the department and individual faculty members. These programs have evolved over a relatively long period of time and generally accomplish what they were designed to do. The demand for Ph.D.'s in academic positions has declined in recent years due to the national demographic and economic situation. As a consequence, these types of Master's programs have experienced a parallel decline in numbers.

The programs specifically designed to train people for non-academic positions are relatively new and subject to changes reflecting the dynamic character of the business and government worlds. Often these programs focus on a special theme such as land use, locational analysis, cartography-remote sensing-computer graphics, environmental planning, or resource management. Recent developments in data acquisition, processing, and analysis, and changes

in institutional frameworks require continual updating of courses and sets of courses to keep these types of programs current.

Some of the most successful programs require, or strongly recommend, an internship program for the students enrolled, and some programs encourage short internships for the faculty as well. Today, more employers are seeking people with some previous practical experience. In response to this new demand, it is desirable that departments concerned with applied research provide some real world experience as part of the student's overall academic program. Of particular importance is the need for the student to learn how academic theories, concepts, methodologies and techniques may be applied to real world situations. Consequently, student internships are becoming an increasingly important way of providing students with the opportunity to experience practical situations during the course of their college program.

Successful internship programs have been developed as part of the undergraduate major program, but they are probably more suited to the Master's level of study. Obviously, internships give students the opportunity to gain practical on-the-job experience, to make personal contacts with professionals in their field, to secure recommendations in support of future job applications and to increase the student's awareness of job opportunities. The students learn to utilize their geographic training, and the internship experience usually serves to open up new awareness on the part of the employers of possible permanent employment for geography students upon graduation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The reputation and fate of a given geography unit or department are determined by non-geographers to a very large degree. The perception of the

discipline and of a given department by administrators and other departments is the overriding and crucial factor in determining geography's existing and future roles. The instructional programs, due in part to their visibility, normally are a major factor in shaping these perceptions. There is an urgent need to promote the relevancy of the discipline to the academicians in other fields, in terms that they understand, as well as to sell the indispensability of geography at a given institution.

It may be said that geography's "Golden Age" began about World War II and ended in the early 1970's. During this period, rapid expansion took place, closely parallelling the overall explosion of the colleges and universities of the country. New geography departments and programs were developed and expanded with little thought to building sound underlying principles that could weather both good times and bad. Perhaps, it is not too late to rediscuss, redefine and promote the major intellectual themes or concepts of the discipline, and articulate them in terms that can be clearly comprehended by geographers and non-geographers at all levels and pursuits. There is a wealth of existing materials pertinent to the problem, and these materials plus new approaches and ideas should be examined critically in light of current and potential roles of the instructional programs.

To be effective, a few broad themes, focuses or concepts, well articulated, rather than many, should be targeted for development. Our credibility will suffer if we claim to be everything to everybody. The concepts and ideas presented in the papers prepared by Professors Borchert, Morrill, and Sommers are most worthy of serious thought and discussions. The concepts must be broad enough to include many of the active subfields of the discipline. Perhaps, national level conferences to define these concepts or

unifying threads or key ideas of geography - the core of the discipline, so to speak, would be the first step. These discussions must also include how these concepts could better serve as a framework for instructional programs and how they could best be presented to the academicians in other disciplines.

We must adjust ourselves to the fact that the baby boom, following World War II, has for the most part passed through the educational systems resulting in declining enrollments. The ramifications include a drastic decrease in the demand for geography teachers or researchers associated with educational institutions at all levels. Perhaps eight to ten departments could supply the national demand for secondary teachers and the academic openings in the colleges and universities for the next decade or more.

Conversely, the idea of working toward the solution of pressing problems facing the nation, state, or local community has caught the fancy of funding foundations, the layman, college and university administrators and our colleagues in other fields. Applied geography is not new and essentially consists of employing geographic methods and techniques, concepts and principles to the definition and resolution of relevant problems. It has a diagnostic and practical value. Further, it may be emphasized that the advantages of utilizing geographic methods and techniques to define and solve practical problems are threefold: First, the basic geographic methodologies and principles may be employed in a variety of problems from purely physical to economic and social, or any combination thereof; secondly, they may be used at various levels of resolutions, ranging from the micrclevel through the meso to macrolevel scales; and finally, the basic aspects of most geographic methodologies may be dealt with at several levels of difficulty or complexity.

Over fifteen years ago, the Commission on College Geography informally investigated why geography was terminated at some of the private colleges and universities. There were several factors common to all of these situations, and these same commonalities have been in evidence in recent cases. However, no one has seriously studied the situations at institutions where the discipline is well established, thriving, and well respected. Are there definable factors common to all these situations and, if so, are these factors transferable? An investigation might reveal information that could be of value to most geography departments.

Years ago, some group under the auspices of the Association should have assumed the responsibility of monitoring and accrediting instructional programs. Many other disciplines have done so, and quite successfully, for decades. The average administrator is most anxious for a recognized national organization to review units or departments under his or her jurisdiction on a semi-regular basis. It is one less responsibility for the administrator to shoulder and will provide the administration with pertinent information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. Such periodic reviews most always would be to the advantage of the department. It would provide guidelines and insights for specific departments, and add credibility and prestige to the discipline. Most important, it would demonstrate to the departments and institutions that someone out there cares and is concerned for the welfare of the discipline and the individual departments. Hopefully, these papers given here today might lead to the development of curriculum guidelines for various levels or types of departments (two-year, four-year, and M.A.) which eventually would serve as a basis for accreditation or approval by the Association in the near future, in some way.

The total number of professional geographers has always been small, not nearly large enough to enable the professional to exert clout nationally or regionally. We have not enjoyed a strong influence on public school systems, state departments of education, government agencies, and each and every college and university. The lack of numbers has prevented the profession overall from assuming positions of national leadership in many inter-disciplinary endeavors. To offset this disadvantage, we must organize our existing resources and manpower in the most effective way.

Although long overdue, it is not too late for the geographic profession to organize, improve and upgrade its products, agree upon and articulate a few broad and major themes or concepts, work together, and promote the discipline. Unlike Canada and most European countries, geography does not have a strong and well-organized base in the primary and secondary school systems. We need to develop a widely accepted working model and overall perspective for the total geographic education process, K to the Ph.D. level, to identify the concepts, skills, subject matter, and the bridges that should be handled at each level.

At this time the professional organizations - national, regional, state, and local - and the individual departments are all doing their own thing with no thought given to a national master plan or overall strategy. We must give careful thought to the welfare of the discipline as a whole and organize ourselves accordingly to meet the serious challenges of the 1980's.